

[I Can Skate Loops Around That Guy]

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I CAN SKATE LOOPS AROUND THAT GUY

The boy limped away from the crowd at the further end of the skating rink, holding in his hand a skate that dangled from its lacing. He had been racing when something happened to his skate; now he laughed at the good-natured scoffs and raillery of his friends.

"I'd have skated loops around that guy in two seconds," he bragged with a bright grin.

"I've beat him more times 'n he's beat me. We're neither of us in shape right now, it's just a week we've been skating this year, but wait till the end of the year, that'll be a race for you,"

"We have an awful job getting the rink free of little kids. The place is cluttered with them. Seems every kid in the neighborhood's got a pair of skates. All the girls think they're going to be another Sonja Heinie. It's not so bad tonight. The girls are out Christmas shopping, most of them. Guess the fellows do what I do. I give my money to my sister and ask her to pick out something for each one in the family, even for herself. That way I'm not bothered at all, Smart, eh?"

The boy's face was small, impish, topped with short, crispy black curls that fell beneath a green woolen toque. He wore a green coat sweater over a lighter weight white pullover. 2
"I'm a junior in high school. The fellow I raced with tonight is a senior. We're good friends but it gets under his skin when I beat him. He's used to getting the laurels in most sports. He's one of the best football players we've got. And can he swim! His old man's Spanish and his mother's Scotch. Joe doesn't understand either language, all he speaks is English.

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Last year we were doing some house to house canvassing to get money for a trip -not the high school football trip, just a neighborhood team- and we thought it'd be best for him to take the Spanish houses seeing he's half that way. But he wouldn't do it. Said he'd be ashamed to admit he couldn't understand or speak Spanish. His old man's a foreman in a stoneshed. But Joe never'll go into the sheds. He wants to go to college, play football, and then pro football. He's good all right. "I don't know what we'll do without him for basketball next year, he's the best we've got in the school. Anyway we've got him this year, that means one more chance to run rings around Montpelier and Burlington. Just watch us." #

The boy sat on the bench removing the other skate. The rink was a jagged oval, defined by waist-high heaps of snow. It lay in an open field facing the Montpelier-Barre road. Behind him it rose the pole slant of snowed hill, its crest merging into the night sky except where the twinkling lights of the sanatorium allowed clear delineations. A quarter of a mile up the road Barre's business street under arches of colored bulbs seethed with Christmas activity.

A girl broke from the group at the end of the rink. She 3 skated with swift, graceful strides. The boy made room for her on the bench, but she shook her head and sank to the hard bank of snow. She was as tall as the boy, and as slim. There was a serious depth to her gray eyes that the boy's laughing brown eyes lacked.

"Joe says he'll race you again for the eats at Firpo's," she announced.

The boy scowled. "With a bum skate? I guess not-"

"He's sent Kina up to the house for her brother's skates," she explained. "You've tried 'em before. You had 'em on last week. They fit you."

"Ye-ah, but I'm not used to them. And Joe eats like a horse when another guy's paying for it. Nina, too. I've paid for their eats before."

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"You've never had to pay from losing in a skating race," the girl pointed out. "You're better'n he is. Besides," she added practically, "you and I are going to eat anyway, why not beat him and make him pay for everything?"

"I can skate loops around him any day," the boy bragged.

"Course you can."

"I'd have beat him tonight if the skate hadn't come apart-"

"Sure, I know it."

"He's tops in basketball and football but I can skate loops around him any day."

"You're telling me-"

"He can do fancy stuff all right but his speed's no good on skates. Speed's what counts, and I got it-" 4 "You sure have," the girl affirmed.

"Okay, okay," the boy agreed. "I'll race him. Even with somebody else's skates I'll race him. And he'd better have plenty of money on him, 'cause I'm sure going to skate loops around that guy."

The girl was satisfied. She shook hard little pellets of snow and ice from her skirt and moved up to the bench between us. Her name was Gay.

"Gabriella, really," she confided, "but I don't like it. it's too foreign sounding. Everybody calls me Gay except my mother and father. They stick to Gabriella. I've given up trying to make them see it my way. Mom says Gay is a good enough name for a dog or a cat, but not for her daughter. In the grades I wrote my name Gabriella until I was in the sixth grade. It's been Gay ever since. My last name's a good long one- Pasquanelli. Pas gua means Easter. Gabriella Pasquanelli, that's a name for you! It doesn't sound like me at

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all, does it? If I ever suggested changing my last name my father'd raise the roof off the house. There was a family lived next door to us with the name Mondocani. It means world of dogs. When the kids got grown up they changed their name to Mondì. I don't blame then any. Father thought it was disgraceful, I mean changing the name. He said he was ashamed to own them as Italians.

"There aren't many Italians in town who change their names, and some of the names are sure tongue-twisters and funny. It wasn't so long ago that Cedar Street and Post Street were called 5 P. Semprebuone Place and L. Bottellino Place after the first Italians who built houses on those streets. The city changed the names of those streets to make it simpler for everybody, I guess. The girl made a face, "Wouldn't this look cute on an envelope- Miss Gabriella Pasquanelli 22-L. Bottellino Place Barre, Vermont.

"Sounds wore like an address in Italy than an address in Vermont; doesn't it? But I'd hate to have it be Italy - now."

"Father works with two Frenchmen. In a stone shed. They gave up their names for English ones years ago. My father says they had reason to do that. They'd started work here at the time of the strike, and father says a French name was poison in those days. They're as Frenchy French as any canucks you've seen, yet they go around with perfectly swell sounding English names, and-

"Hey, take it easy," the boy interrupted with his ever-ready grin. "My old man came down from Canada himself."

"He wasn't a strike breaker," Gay said lightly. "He isn't included with the rest of the French."

"You certainly don't lose any love on the French," the boy remarked with a moody twist of his lips.

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"I said I was going to eat with you, didn't I?" the girl hurried to say. "I wouldn't eat with anyone I disliked; would I?"

The boy stared hard at his skates, "Flo Blodgett broke her engagement with Squeek Fernandos right after he bought her a swell feed in the Barre Restaurant. The same night, and it 6 didn't bother her a bit. Squeek says he's going to join the army."

"Well, I'm not Flo Blodgett nor anyone like her!" Two spots of red flamed in the girl's cheeks.

"No," the boy grinned, "You're Gabriella Pasquanelli, Gabriella Pasquanelli."

"Listen, Pete Vitleau, if you're trying to get me sore-"

"Who's trying to get who sore?"

"- you're out of luck, 'cause I'm not getting me an ugly mood tonight."

"Aw, forget it-"

"Look," I interrupted pointing to a figure skimming over the field of snow. "Isn't that the girl who was going for a pair of skates for you?"

"Yes, that's Mina," the girl agreed.

The boy said nothing. Gay bent down, unlaced her shoes, and did them up again tightly. She fussed with her scarf, and took time pushing strands of dark brown hair under her beret. She wouldn't look at the boy. Nor would he look at her.

The group at the end of the rink began shouting. "Hey, Pete, you coming?" And Joe's loud voice. "C'mon, wise guy, put on these skates and let's see what you can do!"

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"I with you'd try it," I put in. "I'd like to see you win."

"Say, I can skate loops around that guy any day," the boy said with a quick jerk of his head.

"How about letting me see you do it?" I urged. The girl stuffed her hands into her pockets. "Are you 7 backing out, Pets Vitleau?"

"Who's backing out?"

"You don't seem very eager to get started," the girl flashed.

"Aw, quit it," he mumbled. "I'm not running across the ice in my stocking feet. Go get the skates for me; will you, Gay?"

Gay threw him a smile over her shoulder and sped across the ice for the skates.

"Gee," the boy said sheepishly, "she can get me plenty sore—"